



The last word Bonus or bogus?

STEVE HOLDEN WONDERES WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE
COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE
BONUS PROMISED IN LAST YEAR'S ELECTION.

Remember the Commonwealth government's election promise last year to pay the top 10 per cent of teachers a bonus based on their performance? If – and it's a big if – the policy really has legs, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is apparently developing what Prime Minister Julia Gillard described in August as 'a nationally consistent, transparent and equitable performance management system,' called the Australian teacher performance management principles and procedures – or, catchy and so pronounceable, ATPMPP for short.

The PM's breathtaking election policy offering back in August was that, 'All teachers will be required to participate in the performance management framework and, for the first time, every teacher in the country will be potentially eligible for a bonus payment if they are a top performer.'

According to the PM, 'Around one in 10 or about 25,000 of the best classroom teachers would receive a performance bonus each year.' On the PM's figures, that means AITSL will be assessing about 250,000 teachers. Mind you, the number of registered or accredited teachers is a lot higher – 380,000

or more – since there are many practicing educators outside schools and many qualified educators who aren't currently teaching, so AITSL really will have its work cut out.

The PM's performance management assessment plan will apparently be based on lesson observations, student performance results based on things like National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy test results, feedback from parents, and the qualifications and professional development activity of teachers. Using the new system, the nation's top-performing teachers who'll be eligible for a bonus are apparently going to be identified by early 2014, based on their performance in 2013.

The idea is that the new performance management system will be based on AITSL's new national professional standards for teachers, expected to be in place this year. The standards specify the proficiency, and skills and knowledge expected of graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teachers in terms of subject content, pedagogy and professional development.

AITSL has been busily developing the national professional standards with a con-

sultation and validation process to check with teachers and principals on their applicability and usefulness.

There were a few issues to come out of that consultation and validation. One was the focus on schools and classrooms, despite the fact that many educators work in other settings; another was ambiguity as to which standards are to be mandatory and which voluntary; a third was that the differentiation between the graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teachers standards is not clear.

All three go to the heart of the PM's new performance management system.

So far as the first goes, it's the best *classroom* teachers who'll receive a performance bonus. What about those in non-school settings or specialists in schools who don't work in classrooms?

So far as the second goes, it's now apparently going to be mandatory. The AITSL graduate and proficient levels were expected to be tied to compulsory teacher registration or accreditation, while the highly accomplished and lead teacher levels would be voluntary. Not any more, if the PM really is going to require teachers to participate in the performance management framework and if it really is going to be based on the national professional standards.

And so far as the third goes, it's anyone's guess as to how the PM's 25,000 10 percenters will be divided up across AITSL's four categories. Likewise, it's anyone's guess as to what effect that dividing up will have on applications across the four categories.

Then there's the question of receiving a performance bonus each year. Can a 2014 10 percenter get another one in 2015?

The real question, of course, is whether this thing will actually happen. **T**

This month's Last Word was written by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher and a likely candidate to be identified as one of the 90 percenters not to receive a performance bonus each year. His latest book is Somebody to Love published by University of Queensland Press.